



Ambassador John Berry – President Mandela Memorial Remarks

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**Ambassador Berry's Remarks  
for the Memorial Service of Nelson Mandela  
Australian National University**

*(As delivered December 12, 2013)*

Prime Minister Hawke, Your Excellencies, distinguished guests.

On behalf of President Obama, and the people of the United States of America, I would like to offer our deepest condolences to President Mandela's family, to the people of South Africa, and to everyone who today enjoys the freedoms he spent his life fighting to achieve.

I am deeply honored and humbled to speak here today as we honor the life of this great man. As I watched scenes from the memorial service in South Africa, I was touched by the joy with which South Africans celebrated his life – despite the weather that made it seem like Nature herself was mourning this great loss.

When one of the United States' greatest Presidents, Abraham Lincoln, died, his Secretary of War Edwin Stanton said this: "Now he belongs to the ages." Earlier this week, President Obama said the exact same of Nelson Mandela. Like President Mandela, Abraham Lincoln understood the value of forgiveness. He understood that turning foes into partners unifies a country and makes it stronger and better for all of its citizens.

However, I don't know that Lincoln – or anybody else – would have felt that way after having the same life experiences that President Mandela experienced. What made him so extraordinary was his ability to forgive wrongs that would have left most of us, most of anyone, crushed by anger and hatred. That kind of forgiveness requires incredible courage. It requires a deep and boundless love. It requires, as President Obama said, a "giant of history."

When I consider how President Mandela influenced my own life and my own career, it was his emphasis on equal opportunity that stood out for me. His belief that everyone – regardless of their race, their gender, their age, or their sexual orientation – should be able to "live together in harmony with equal opportunities." This is an ideal that we should all strive for.

He saw that diversity strengthens our societies. That diversity helps us identify and build the best set of talents, experience, and perspectives. And diversity helps all of us to achieve and perform to the best of our abilities.

President Mandela offered what is probably the most fitting eulogy for his own life when he said: "What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead."



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By that measure – and by any measure – Nelson Mandela's life counted. He led a country to freedom. He gave hope to millions. He profoundly touched the lives of men and women whom he never would meet. And every one of us here today has had our lives enriched because of his. And every one of us is poorer for the loss.

Madiba's legacy reminds us today that human beings – and countries – can change for the better. And that in this, the season of peace, that the angel's prayer of peace on earth, goodwill to all can – even in this twenty-first century, cynical as it is – still ring clearer and truer than ever before.

As President Obama said, "We have lost one of the most influential, courageous, and profoundly good human beings that we will ever share time with."

May God bless Nelson Mandela. May God bless the people of South Africa. And may God bless each of you in this season of peace.